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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **FORMER PASTOR SENTENCED TO 11 YEARS FOR AGGRAVATED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

**PHOENIX, ARIZONA** –The United States Attorneys Office for the District of Arizona, announced that on June 30, 2003, Henry Saunders, former pastor at the Sweetwater Church of God, DOB12/22/43, of Sweetwater, was sentenced to 11 years (135 months), by United States District Judge James A. Teilborg, in Phoenix, Arizona.

Henry Saunders was found guilty by jury in Prescott, Arizona, on April 10, 2003, of three counts of Aggravated Sexual Abuse of a Child. The evidence showed that on multiple occasions in 1993, the defendant sexually abused the victim, a relative then 11 years of age, by forcing her to engage in sexual intercourse in his house, in his trailer, and in a truck on the side of the road. At the time of the sexual abuse, the defendant was serving as pastor at the Sweetwater Church of God, Sweetwater, Arizona. During the trial, the defendant testified on his own behalf, alleging that the criminal investigator in the case fabricated a written statement containing a confession to the crimes.

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In imposing the sentence, Judge Teilborg admonished the defendant that his position as a pastor “cannot excuse the nature of this horrific crime.” Judge Teilborg also expressed the need to send a message to others who commit this “despicable crime,” but conceded that “no sentence can ease the victim’s pain or shame or make the victim whole.” The Judge further commented that, given the defendant’s age, imprisonment for what may be the remainder of the defendant’s life, was appropriate.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was supervised by Criminal Investigators of the Navajo Nation Criminal Investigation Service, Shiprock, New Mexico, and assisted by Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The prosecution was handled by the office of the United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-02-321-PCT-JAT  
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